

SkillSharpener Web Extra

Good reps will have the right words for every occasion

Not every customer encounter is going to work out positively. Customers can be angry, rude, melodramatic, uncertain, confused, and non-communicative, and they don't always agree with your suggestions, says Renée Evenson, a customer service trainer and author of *Powerful Phrases for Effective Customer Service*.

But Evenson believes that reps can be better prepared for customer encounters of all types if they know the right phrases to use both for general, everyday situations — welcoming phrases, and phrases to build rapport or express appreciation, for example — and for particularly challenging customer situations.

■ Welcome

Often, just providing a warm welcome to customers can help get a customer interaction off on the right foot, even with customers who might otherwise be upset or difficult.

Evenson suggests that customer encounters start with a pleasant "Welcome," "Good morning!" or "Thank you for calling ABC Company! My name is Mary." Other welcoming phrases include: "How may I help you?" "What can I help you with today?" or "Can I help you find something?"

"Offering a warm welcome to your customers helps break the ice, helps the customer begin forming a positive impression of you, and helps to create an atmosphere of comfort," Evenson says. "And if your company has a standard greeting, add a phrase of welcome to personalize it.

■ Courtesy

Phrases of courtesy that should be a part of every rep's normal vocabulary include "Please," "Thank you," "You're welcome," "Excuse me, I didn't hear what you said," "Sir," "Ma'am," and "Yes" rather

than "Yeah." Reps should also use phrases like, "I'll check and be right back," "Will you hold a moment while I check on that?" and "Thanks for waiting."

■ Assurance

Customer service reps should also be ready with phrases of assurance for customers. These include phrases like: "I'm going to take care of this right now," "Let me see what happened so I can correct that for you," "I'm going to get you to the department that can help, and I'll stay on the line until they answer," and "I'll make sure that this doesn't happen again."

■ Regret

Whenever a customer comes to you with a problem or an issue that needs to be resolved, Evenson adds, "the first words out of your mouth should always include a phrase of regret — like, 'I'm sorry that happened' — followed by an assurance that you are going to help. Saying 'I'm sorry' is a great way to break the ice and let the customer know that you feel for what they are going through."

In addition to having the right phrases handy, however, reps also need to have the right attitude and tone of voice to go along with the phrases. "Actions do speak louder than words," Evenson says, "so if you say, 'I'm sorry that happened,' but you say it flippantly or indifferently, or you are paying attention to something else, then the customer isn't going to get the message you intended." ■

